

**Working Together and Improving Collaboration:**  
*Next steps for increasing awareness of invasive species in the southeast*

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*Introduction*

The “2010 Controlling Invasives and Promoting Natives through Collaborative Efforts in the Southeast” Conference gave participants opportunities to learn about various efforts concerning invasive management in the southeastern states, and also provided opportunities for collaboration and discussion. Detailed discussions were particularly enhanced by incorporating breakout sessions into the conference.

During the breakout session titled *Working Together and Improving Collaboration*, speakers presented on available collaborative networks including the National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS), the Exotic Pest Plant Council (EPPC), the Bugwood Network, Early Detection and Dispersion Mapping System (EDDmaps), and the South Carolina Herbarium Consortium. After the presentations there was a facilitated discussion concerning how to use these existing networks to make outreach efforts more effective. One of the discussion topics was a need for increased awareness about invasives for the nursery (green) industry and the general public. The breakout group’s next steps were to come up with a key concept that partners throughout the region can support and promote to increase awareness among these target audiences. In order to determine an appropriate key concept, a survey was designed to gather what conference participants deemed important for the public to know concerning invasives. This report outlines those responses and will utilize them to help create a key concept to increase invasive species awareness and guide some of the next steps in addressing invasive plants in the southeast through collaborative outreach efforts.

*Survey Design*

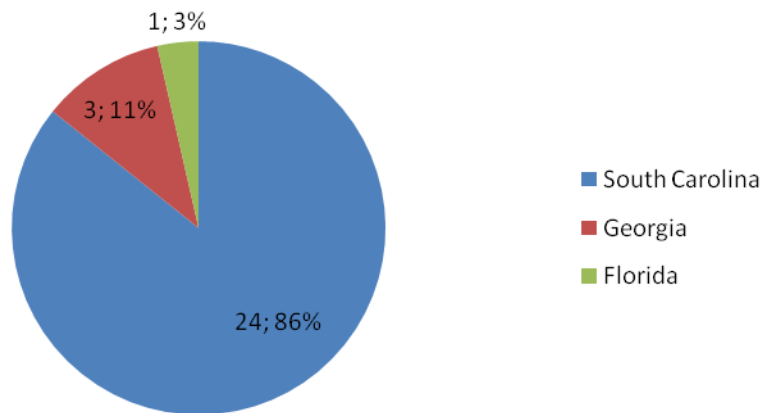
The survey was created not only to determine what key concepts should be included in messages about invasives, but also to provide participants with information on how they can continue to be involved in collaborative efforts.

The first part of the survey ascertained where the participants were from, and what their affiliation is, and what skill sets were best represented by their affiliation. Participants were also asked who the target audience of invasives awareness should be and what key concepts people should know concerning invasive species in the southeast. Finally, participants were asked how they are involved or would like to be involved with future collaborative efforts. Participants were also given an opportunity to leave their contact information to stay informed on NERR efforts concerning invasives species.

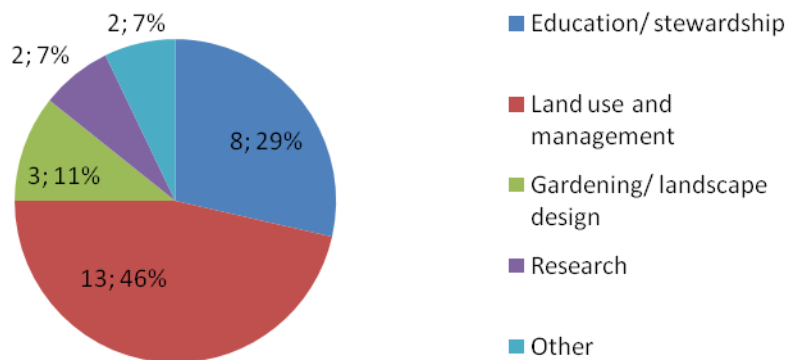
### Survey Outcomes

The majority of the 77 attendees to the conference were from South Carolina. This was most likely due to the location of the conference being in South Carolina. However there were a few attendees from Georgia, North Carolina, and one from Florida. Therefore the majority of the 28 conference attendees who also participated in the collaboration survey were also from South Carolina. Three survey participants were from Georgia, one from Florida and none from North Carolina (see Figure 1). An overwhelming majority of the participants work in education/stewardship or land use management, as seen in Figure 2. The “other” category consists of a forester and an author.

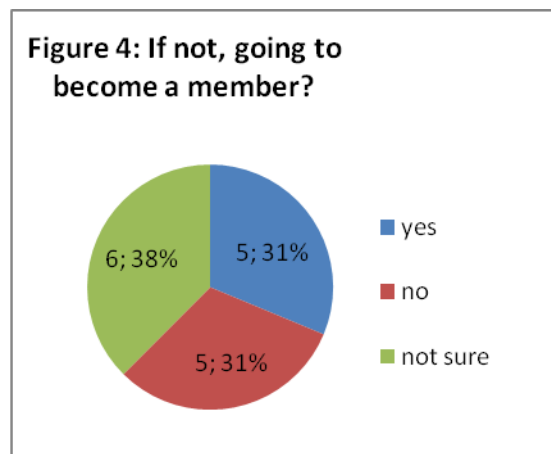
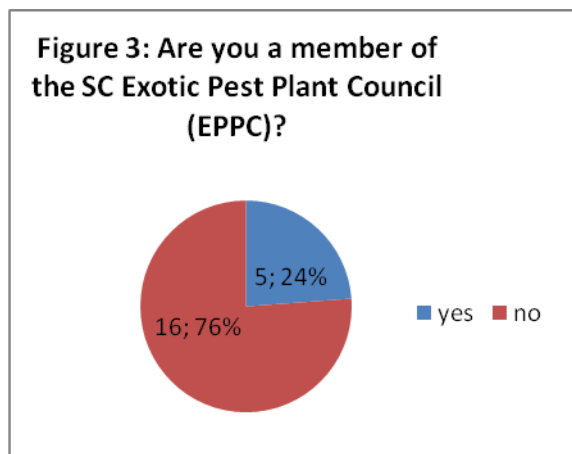
**Figure 1: What state do you live in?**



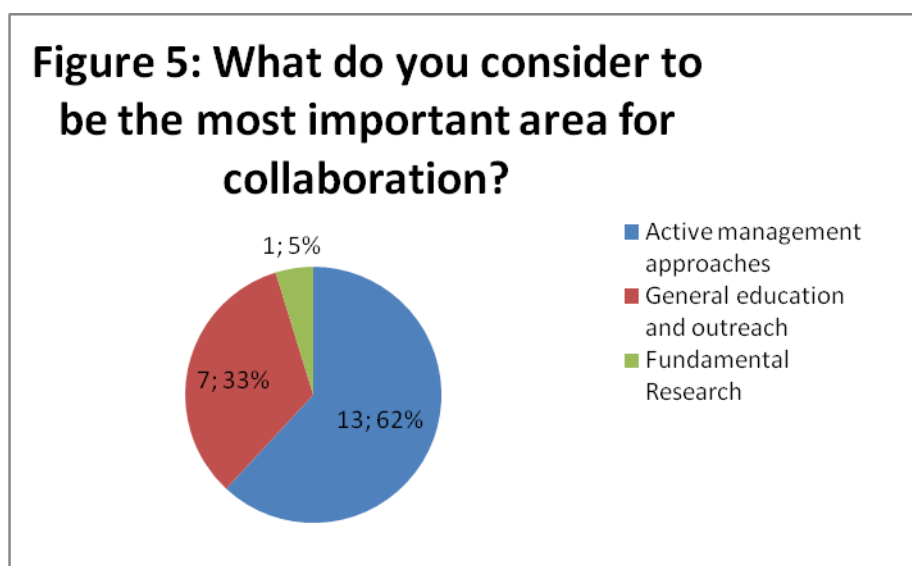
**Figure 2: What area of expertise best describes the work that you do?**



Survey participants were also asked whether they are a member of the South Carolina Exotic Pest Plant Council (SC EPPC). The SC EPPC co-partner for this conference, and led the Early Detection and Rapid Response (EDRR) training portion of the conference. EDRR is a process of identifying invasives plant species and managing them before they can have an irreversible effect on the environment. Being involved as a member of the SC EPPC is a way for participants to stay involved in collaborative efforts. The majority of the participants are not member of the SC EPPC (Figure 3). As shown by Figure 4, approximately a third of those not a member say they plan on joining in the future.



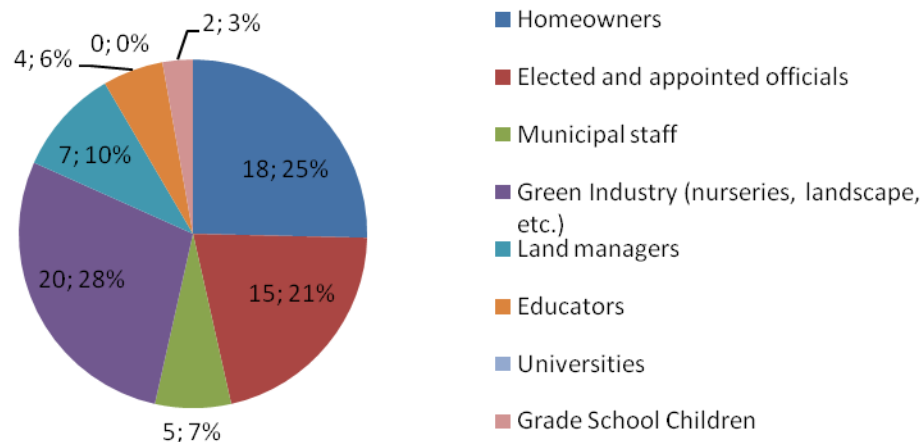
Participants were also asked what area should be a priority for future collaborative efforts. Figure 5 shows the two main areas identified for future collaborative efforts are more active management approaches to controlling the spread and introduction of invasive species, and continued education and outreach efforts to increase the awareness of invasives in the southeast and the impact they have on the natural and human environment.



Participants were given a list of target audience groups to be the focus of continued invasive plant education in the southeast. They were allowed to select their top three audience choices for these

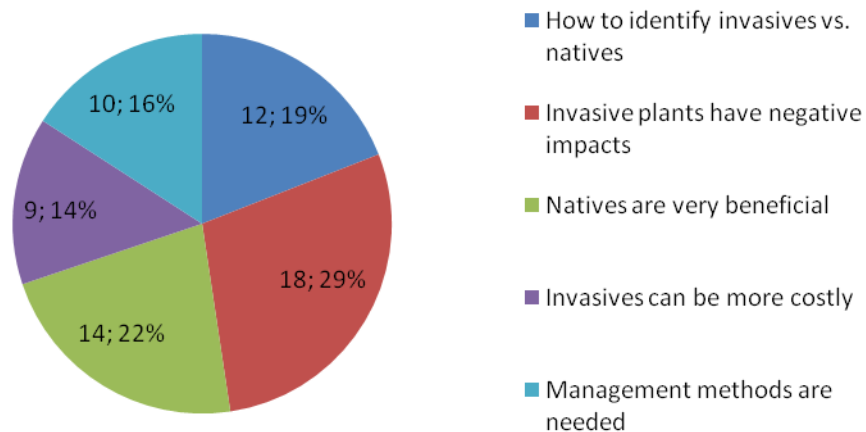
efforts. Homeowners, elected and appointed officials, and green industry staff were the top three audience groups identified (Figure 6). Future outreach efforts should be designed to increase awareness and education concerning invasives plants to these target audience groups. Educational institutions and staff (for grade school children, universities, and educators) were not identified as being a priority for invasive plant education. Instead, land managers and municipal staff were identified as the next priority audience.

**Figure 6: Who should be the target audience for invasive education? - Top three choices**



Finally, participants were given the opportunity to indicate up to four key concepts that they think the general public should know concerning invasives and native plants in the southeast. These responses were evaluated and analyzed using open coding methods. There were five key concepts that were repeatedly mentioned, as seen in Figure 7. Twenty-nine percent of the key concept responses concerned the negative impacts that invasive plants have on the environment. This was followed by 22% of the responses concerning how natives are beneficial to the environment and humans. Other key concepts identified included how to identify invasives plant species, the cost and maintenance required by invasive plants, and the management methods that are available and need to control the spread of invasives in the southeast.

**Figure 7: What key concepts should the public know about invasives/natives in the southeast?**



#### *Identified Key Concepts*

As the above Figure 7 shows, there were five main concepts identified using the survey response (in order of highest number of response):

- 1) Invasive plants have negative impacts on the environment.
- 2) Natives are very beneficial.
- 3) How to identify invasives versus native plants.
- 4) Management methods are available and needed.
- 5) Invasives require more cost and maintenance.

A few of these concepts can be further broken down into sub-concepts. “Invasive plants have negative impacts on the natural environment” included responses referring to impacts on the natural habitat as well as impacts on land use and value. The responses for “natives are very beneficial” included how native plants are beneficial to the natural environment including animals, other plants, and the overall ecosystem; additional responses included how natives require less maintenance and are naturally better adapted to the climate and soil conditions making them more economical to establish and maintain. There were also two main ideas regarding management methods that were repeatedly mentioned by participants: native alternatives should be used to replace invasive plant use, and invasives plants should be disposed of properly so as to not encourage their spread.

### *Summary and Recommendations*

The goal of this survey was to identify the perceived outreach needs for future collaborative efforts. The majority of responses suggest “Invasive plants have negative impacts on the environment” is a key concept that the public should know concerning invasive plants in the southeast. However this concept had only a slight margin over “How to identify invasive plants” and “Natives are beneficial”. Therefore it is recommended that these three concepts are used in conjunction with each other in future outreach efforts to increase awareness and education of invasives. These concepts should also focus on reaching the target audiences of homeowners, elected and appointed officials, and green industry staff including nurseries and landscapers. A suggested next step would be to educate nurseries and landscaping staff on how to identify invasives and natives so that homeowners can then be educated on what kind of plants to purchase for their landscaping. This could include simple awareness presentations and/or Early Detection and Rapid Response (EDRR) training. By educating the green industry, and working with them to educate homeowners on the cons of invasives and benefits of natives, there can be continued efforts in the controlling of invasives and promoting of natives in the southeast.

Survey participants also listed collaborative projects they are interested in becoming involved with along with their contact information. With these key concepts in mind, the appropriate participants may be contacted to plan future outreach efforts.

*The “2010 Controlling Invasives and Promoting Natives through Collaborative Efforts in the Southeast” Conference occurred February 1-3, 2010, at the Camp St. Christopher Conference Center on Seabrook Island, SC. This event was sponsored by: the Southeast National Estuarine Research Reserves (NERR) - ACE Basin NERR, North Carolina NERR, North Inlet-Winyah Bay NERR, Sapelo Island NERR, and Guana Tolomato Matanzas NERR; the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources; and the South Carolina Exotic Pest Plant Council.*